DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 988 EA 032 844

AUTHOR Williamson, Ronald

TITLE Renorming the Professional Development of Urban Middle School Principals.

PUB DATE 2000-08-00

NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (54th, Ypsilanti, MI, August 8-12, 2000).

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; Administrator Responsibility; Administrator Role; Educational Improvement; Higher Education; Inservice Education; *Instructional Leadership; Management Development; Middle Schools; Occupational Information; *Principals; Professional Development; Professional Education; Urban Schools

IDENTIFIERS Corpus Christi Independent School District TX; Jefferson County Public Schools KY

ABSTRACT

Many urban school districts face persistent problems of low student achievement, high staff turnover, and demands for greater accountability. Confronted by such problems, Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools and the Corpus Christi (Texas) Independent School District participated in a multi-year project to strengthen instructional leadership skills in the districts' middle-school principals. This paper reports on the project. The project engaged middle-school principals in a series of activities to strengthen their skills and build leadership capacity to improve student achievement. The projects was build on three principles: (1) the importance of principal leadership in sustaining school reform; (2) the value of embracing participants in more interactive and engaging professional development; and (3) the importance of incorporating constructivist approaches to learning. In addition to describing the project, this paper describes a study that evaluated the success of the professional development activities of the project participants. The study examined participants' reactions, learning, and use of new knowledge and skills. (WFA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

UD UDTP 0189

ED 481 988

Renorming the Professional Development of Urban Middle School Principals

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Williamson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Ronald Williamson, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
PO Box 26171
Greensboro, NC 27402-6171
(336) 334-3468
e-mail: RDWILLI2@uncg.edu

Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, August 2000, Ypsilanti, MI

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA 032 844

The emphasis on identifying and raising standards has placed urban schools in both an advantageous and precarious position. On the one hand, the current milieu of reform offers all schools, especially urban schools, a chance to confront persistent hardships with new fervor and support. On the other hand, the pressure for performance can tempt schools to resort to quick-fix remedies, ignoring the systemic issues that often keep these schools in a perpetual cycle of failure.

Many urban school districts face persistent problems of low student achievement, high staff turnover, and demands for greater accountability resulting in a need for long-term systemic reform. Confronted by such problems the Jefferson County (KY) and Corpus Christi Independent Schools (TX) were invited to participate in a multi-year project to strengthen instructional leadership skills among the district's middle school principals.

Funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Program for Student Achievement in conjunction with the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the "Principals Make a Difference in Standards-Based Reform" project engaged middle school principals from both districts in a series of activities to strengthen their skills and build leadership capacity to improve student achievement.

The project was built on three defining principles: (1) the importance of principal leadership in sustaining school reform (Lambert, 1998; Schwann & Spady, 1998; Speck, 1996); (2) the value of embracing participants in more interactive and engaging professional development (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Speck, 1996); and (3) the importance of incorporating constructivist approaches to learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Mohr, 1998a; Wagner, 1998).

The implications of these three principles were profound in the design and implementation of the project. Recognizing that reform is most successful where the principal is a forceful and highly visible advocate led to a focus on working with principals to examine their leadership. Tasks were designed to engage principals in examining real school issues, identifying problems and constructing solutions.

New Visions of Staff Development

Serious systemic issues confront school leaders as they reform their schools. Indeed, the expectation in every state is that leaders will play a central role in assuring that their school is accountable for improved student learning, for greater collaboration with constituent groups, and for assuring a rigorous and challenging academic experience.

A central feature of reform initiatives is helping school personnel to develop the skills to modify practice and address these important issues. Professional development becomes critical.

Educators have traditionally held a narrow definition of staff development (Monahan, 1996). It often consisted of a series of disconnected sessions presented by district personnel or external consultants. Its success was often measured in hours of participation, rather than results. It was often characterized by presentation of new information and ideas and little subsequent effort to apply new learnings.

A new conception of professional development has emerged, driven in part by the missteps of prior efforts. Led by the National Staff Development Council, but advocated by all major professional organizations, staff development is increasingly characterized by new ideas---results-driven, systems thinking, and constructivist (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

These ideas impacted the way professional development was designed and delivered. The notion that the success of professional development should be measured by results required schools to consider their focus, begin with the end in mind, and assess the impact on student learning. Establishing a link between professional development and one's work led to greater appreciation for the application of learning, its meaning for individuals in their own setting. It resulted in activities that varied from school to school and encouraged educators to construct their own meaning and application.

Simultaneously to development of new staff development standards, a set of standards for school leaders was designed (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). These standards emphasized greater collaboration among school leaders, teachers and parents, and recognized the importance of

"advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, 24).

Description of the Project

Developing leadership capacity was central to this project. Every middle school principal in both districts, thirty-six in all, joined one of six cohorts. Each group met six times over two years and participated in a set of activities examining their school's programs and their leadership behaviors. An outside facilitator worked with each group on structuring their task.

A recent study of urban middle school principals identified elements of a sound professional development program---examining the meaning and practice of leadership; developing strategies for greater collaboration; and designing tools that might be used to improve principal's work (Neufeld, 1997). This emphasis was built on a strong commitment by principals to increasingly collaborative leadership, and designing and implementing strategies to work with teachers in order to improve teaching and learning (Useem, Christman, Gold & Simon, 1997).

A recent report on the Annenberg Institute for School Reform's work identified several attributes of effective principal professional development (Evans & Mohr, 1999). The "Principals Make a Difference in Standards Based Reform" project, launched prior to the Annenberg report, incorporated many of the recommended characteristics. It provided collaborative groups but respected the need for individual principals to create their own meaning of the cohort's work. It provided a protected setting where principals could challenge their own and their colleague's thinking. It valued time to investigate, reflect, and design new ways of doing ones work and it engaged participants in activities which confronted many of the challenges present in urban middle schools.

The cohort model used in this project responded to the needs of principals and affirmed a central feature of most school reform recommendations---collaborative work to address persistent school reform challenges. Tasks were designed to maximize interaction among participants and to promote thoughtful

Table 1

Attributes of Principal Professional Development

1. Principals' learning is personal and yet takes place most effectively while working in groups.
2. Principals foster more powerful faculty and student learning by focusing on their own learning.
3. While we honor principals' thinking and voices, we want to push principals to move beyond their assumptions.
4. Focused reflection takes time away from "doing the work," yet it is essential.
5. It takes strong leadership in order to have truly democratic learning.
6. Rigorous planning is necessary for flexible and responsive implementation.
7. New learning depends on protected dissonance.

From: Evans, P. & Mohr, N. (1999). Professional development for principals: Seven core beliefs. Phi Delta Kappan, 80(7), 530-532.

reflection about practice. The design incorporated best practice for successful study groups and leadership preparation---they were small, fewer than six; a facilitator convened meetings, provoked conversation, and kept the group on task; and participants worked together to construct their own learning and design strategies for use in their own schools (Mohr, 1998b; Murray, 1998; Speck, 1996).

The use of cohorts provides benefits to participants, but also presents challenges (Barnett & Muse, 1993). Cohort meetings were structured to put participants at ease and to create a climate conducive to healthy conversation and debate. Sessions were held in schools, sites familiar to participants. They provided easy access to real classrooms, students, and teachers and kept the work grounded in the day-to-day realities of school life. Initial discussion

centered on describing the schools, talking about students, and sharing current reform initiatives. These first steps established a climate open to discussion of tough and complex reform issues.

Year 1 Activities - During the initial year of the project cohorts were established and activities launched. Each cohort consisted of principals from each of the two districts. Two in-district meetings were conducted, one in each district. One additional meeting took place at the annual conference of The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

The initial visit to each district was designed to acquaint the participants with one another and with their schools. During the visits participants were briefed on reform initiatives and became familiar with each of the communities. During the first year each cohort developed a greater understanding of standards-based reform in each district, identified barriers to reform at each site, and articulated their own professional development needs.

To conclude the first year's activities a summer leadership retreat was held in each district. Principals participated in training provided by NASSP on instructional leadership, decision-making models, and strategies for working more collaboratively with stakeholders.

Year 2 Activities - The second year was comprised of similar activities. The cohorts met once again in each district, participated in a national conference sponsored by The Education Trust, and held a joint summer retreat.

Cohorts selected a problem related to standards-based reform as a focus of their work. Selection of the problem was left to each cohort resulting in a different emphasis for each group. The cohorts studied the problem---identified current research about the topic, developed a set of strategies for use at their site, implemented initial activities on their campus, and gathered data regarding the strategy. Discussion and examination of the impact of their work characterized subsequent meetings. Cohorts then prepared a report about their activities to share during the summer retreat.

The Study

Evaluating the success of professional development activities is complex (Guskey & Sparks, 1991). Guskey (2000) suggested five measures for the success of staff development---participants' reactions, participants' learning, organization support and change, participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes (pp. 78-86). Each level builds on the previous and requires varied resources and support. Guskey identified short questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, learning logs, writing samples and on-site observations as strategies for measuring each of these elements.

This study examined three of those elements---participants' reactions, participants' learning, and participants' use of new knowledge and skills. Participants' reactions were gathered through short open-ended response questions at the end of each cohort meeting and through individual and small group interviews. Additional information was collected from writing samples (e.g., journals) prepared by participants throughout the project. Participants' learning was assessed through small group discussions and analysis of written documents. On-site observation in each of the participants' schools as well as the end of project portfolio assessed use and application of skills.

A primary source of data were interviews conducted with each of the cohorts. An open-ended format was selected (Spradley, 1979) because it afforded the researcher an opportunity for greater interaction with the participants and allowed them to converse spontaneously and with great energy.

Written notes of each interview were prepared. This created a document of each interview that could be later reviewed and analyzed for key words and ideas.

In such interviews the role of the participant often changes to that of "informant" (Yin, 1994). Such informants are critical to the success of case study research. Yin suggested that informants not only provide their own insights into the investigation but provide the researcher with suggestions for additional ways to gather data.

The interviews served yet another function. They provided an opportunity for the researcher to corroborate certain facts which emerged from other documentation (e.g., response forms, reflective writing). The interviews allowed the researcher to probe the written responses and to elicit information from the respondents about the impact of the project.

Data were collected in other ways as well. Participants maintained journals throughout the project and these writings were reviewed and analyzed to reveal trends and implications for ongoing professional development. Additionally, each cohort developed a project, a product, for submission at the end of the study. Each cohort product included application of the participant's learning at the school site. While reflecting a common theme, the specific applications varied from school to school. Finally, visits by the researchers at each school campus permitted direct observation of the use and application of learnings from the project.

Ongoing data analysis was utilized for this study (Eisner, 1991; Yin 1994). Information was arranged in files for each cohort and each principal (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Sources of information were charted and coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Charles' (1995) four steps were utilized to identify topics, cluster topics into categories, form categories into patterns, and develop conclusions based on the patterns.

Open-ended responses and writings were analyzed to identify patterns of responses and reveal major themes. Interview data were then examined, using key word and trend analyses. The themes were confirmed and the interviews provided explicit details and examples to illustrate each of the themes.

The study examined the impact of a professional development model on principal behavior. It focused primarily on process responses, those strategies employed to build and sustain school reform. By examining these responses other approaches were not minimized. The emphasis, however, was on identification of those strategies that nurtured and supported the professional development of principals.

This study, while focused on urban middle level principals, identified strategies used to successfully work with school leaders in any setting to

address persistent and potentially contentious issues. The work of these principals can inform and enlighten the work of school leaders at any level.

Lessons About Professional Development of Urban Middle School Principals

Important lessons emerged from this project. They reflect the continuing metamorphosis of professional development from didactic to interactive, from directive to collaborative, and from a focus on management to a focus on student learning. These lessons provide useful insights for those planning similar projects.

Lesson 1: Creation of Community was Essential

The success of this project was grounded on the creation of learning communities among the cohorts (Cherniss, 1998; Lambert, 1998; Mohr, 1998b; Wagner, 1998). During the first year of the project the cohorts evolved from a collection of principals to a community of learners. This metamorphosis transformed the project. Rather than merely participate in the activities, the principals became invested in each others learning and in one another's success.

Initial meetings were occasionally tenuous. Skepticism about what to expect resulted in visits that consisted primarily of learning about current school programs and district reform strategies. Principals grappled with questions such as: How much do you reveal about yourself and your school to strangers? How comfortable are you talking about contentious issues? For many principals the initial conversations were guarded, showcased sound practices, but failed to generate discussion about the persistent barriers to school reform. Those first discussions, while guarded, were important. They contributed to the creation of a safe, caring environment, one that supported and nurtured the more difficult discussions that followed.

Subsequent activities were quite different. As principals invested in the discussion, and established friendships with their colleagues, they warmed to the dialogue. They talked about the barriers to reform present in their schools

and eagerly sought advice from their colleagues. Participants asked tough questions yet remained supportive and encouraging (Garmston, 1998).

Maintaining cohorts throughout the project strengthened participant's commitment to the project and to one another. Second-year conversations evolved much more quickly to substantive issues of standards-based reform. There was no need to develop trust, to be cautious about risk taking. It was already present. For example, during the first hour of one meeting a principal said to her colleagues, "I've got a problem and I need your advice. I couldn't wait for us to get together to talk about it." Such enthusiasm for important conversation was apparent in every cohort group.

As a result of their time together cohorts recognized the importance of long-term commitment to school reform. One consistent observation from principals was the importance of developing long-term reform strategies, those that result in substantive change in the norms of their schools. This recognition led members to embrace the concepts embedded in this project: identification of contentious issues, construction of shared meaning and solutions, implementation and evaluation of those solutions, and continued refining as needed. Almost to a person, the cohort members understood the importance of maintaining a long-term focus, rather than seeking short-term solutions.

Corollary 1: Reduce Isolation. The trials and tribulations associated with leadership in a challenging school often takes a toll on school leaders. Even the most confident of principals is shaken by excessive school violence, or disgruntled teachers. While understandable, self-doubt may be the gravest danger to the urban middle school principals' capacity to lead their school. Efficacy—that ability to believe you are capable of making a difference in the lives of children—is just as critical to instructional leaders, as it is to classroom teachers. In fact, since principals must invite themselves and others to explore new visions, new ways, new avenues, it is ever more imperative that they exude confidence.

Just as the early studies of teacher efficacy traced its demise to loneliness and isolation, so it is with principals (Ashton & Webb, 1986). In the

midst of early cohort meetings, the sense of isolation that typically characterizes the professional lives of most principals arose. Many principals spoke about the isolation associated with the principalship. Principals rarely have time or opportunity to talk with one another, to reveal problems with their schools, and to work with colleagues to construct solutions. This project provided both time and opportunity and was much appreciated by the participants. It provided principals with time to share both their joys and frustrations, to talk about both the regularities and the irregularities of school life and to seek advice from colleagues and friends.

As a result of cohort activities, principals recognized that many of their schools faced similar issues---reluctant and disengaged staff, student violence, unresponsive instruction, and confusion about standards and high-pressure accountability. Large, district-wide professional development activities often provoked similar sentiments but failed to result in collaboration and opportunity to develop shared solutions. The presence of small cohorts was a key to the establishment of community among the participants. One principal remarked during a debriefing, "I thought it was just me or our district. What a relief to know we all face the same problem. Now we can get to work on it together."

Almost to a person, the cohort members embraced the importance of maintaining a focus on establishing a learning community capable of continual self-improvement. As their collegiality extended and deepened, these cohort relationships provided principals with hope, support, wisdom and the courage to imagine new possibilities. One principal summed it up when he said, "We're not here to see through each other, but we are here to see each other through."

Corollary 2: Create a Risk-Free Setting. Traditionally principals were not rewarded for identifying challenges faced by their schools. They were expected to be masterful at projecting their school's successes and honors, not articulating deficiencies and areas for improvement.

This norm colored early cohort activities. Visits and conversations showcased successful activities. Achievement data were presented in positive light. The classrooms of expert teachers were the only ones visited.

As the cohorts evolved, principals became increasingly candid, more comfortable asking difficult questions of colleagues, and challenging the "regularities" of one another's schools. Each meeting lead to greater clarity, often resulting in re-commitment and re-energizing behavior. Together, the cohorts supported and nurtured one another, offering advice, provoking new thinking, and working to maintain a focus on standards-based reform.

Contributing to this dramatic transformation was careful attention to process. The meetings were more than sharing information and meeting with colleagues. They were about engaging colleagues in discussion of contentious and difficult issues. This required sensitivity to the way members interacted. Garmston (1998) found that "part of our difficulty with conflict is how we talk about it" (p. 56). This project was no different.

In all human exchange, there is a tendency to let personality be a deciding factor in how we communicate. Unfortunately, when applied to group work, this often means that groups are not nearly as productive and helpful as they might be.

An assumption, which guided initial cohort meetings, was that school leaders would be highly skilled at group process and would need little coaching to provoke productive work. This was not the case. One consistent observation was principals' tremendous need to share personal stories, at times at the expense of listening intently to others. Moreover, off-task side-bar conversations often left the groups struggling for focus. These behaviors, while more frequent in the early months of cohort work, were nonetheless helpful reminders of how important facilitation is to effective group process.

Project facilitators carefully attended to group process. They were attentive to acknowledging all contributions, to refraining from judgmental statements. They chose language that was inviting and encouraged interaction. They called on reluctant participants to assure their involvement. They discussed confidentiality and were attentive to communication between cohort members. They established processes for sharing information between meetings via e-mail or mailings. They publicly recorded group discussion and decisions, and most importantly they resisted imposing their own standards on the group.

Cohorts often took hold of their own group process issues and created a plan to resolve initial problems. For example, one group committed to active listening, thoughtful questioning, and maintaining a focus on the activity rather than the person. They grew to value raising difficult questions, probing for underlying assumptions, and suggesting of alternatives, but they also grew more cognizant of the powerful role group process plays in school reform.

Cohort meetings were most successful when process issues were agreed upon. For example, one group committed to active listening, thoughtful questioning, and maintaining a focus on the activity rather than the person. They grew to value raising difficult questions, probing for underlying assumptions, and suggestion of alternatives. Comfort with challenging the thinking of cohort members along with valuing diverse perspectives strengthened cohort work.

Lesson 2: Ground the Project in Principals' Work

Another important learning was that professional development centered on real-world tasks builds commitment. Participants must see its usefulness, its potential to inform their practice and its applicability to their own setting. The cohort experience lent itself to collaborative endeavors and to construction of new meaning, to creation of tools to improve ones work. Built on the relationships nurtured during the first year, and secure in the knowledge that each principal faced similar issues, the conversation moved to specific strategies for advancing school reform.

Once community was established the cohorts delved into some of the persistent instructional issues in their schools. They talked about designing tools and strategies that they might be used to strengthen their work. This approach was widely supported and became the primary focus of the project's second year. For example, one cohort examined the persistent question of rigor in their school's program. From their discussion emerged a shared set of readings about the concept, a design for activities to engage parents and faculty in discussions about rigor, and a framework for assessing the presence of rigor in their school's curricular program.

This was a critical transition. Principal's work is frequently fragmented, too hectic to devote much time to conversation. Participants, therefore, were anxious to move to specifics--to develop concrete and detailed strategies for working with their faculties and communities on standards-based reform.

A constructivist approach was adopted. Each cohort identified barriers to standards-based reform in their setting, selected those of greatest importance, and developed an agenda for their work. Increased support and enthusiasm for the project ensued. It became the principal's agenda, was directly connected to needs in their own schools, and enlisted them as active participants in constructing solutions to the really complex problems confronted in their communities.

Corollary 1: Make Projects Personally Meaningful. Nothing dooms professional development faster than for it to be imposed externally (Monahan, 1996; Zepeda, 1999). Fidelity to the premises on which this project was built---importance of principal leadership, interactive and engaging processes, and constructivist learning---required that participants identify and select the issue they wished to investigate.

Adopting this stance was not without risks. Some participants were initially guarded and unwilling to commit to the project due to prior emphases on short-term responses. Others were reluctant to identify difficult and challenging goals. Still others simply wanted to "get it done."

It was essential that facilitators adopt a neutral stance regarding the topic identified in each cohort. Thoughtful questions, based on school visits and the principals reports, clarified cohort thinking. In the end each cohort selected a different theme. Similarities emerged---each cohort decided that individual contributions, while respectful of local school needs, must contribute to greater understanding of the issue by the cohort, not just one participant.

The topics reflected the eclectic interests of the principals: how to more effectively use teacher planning time to address instructional issues, ways to examine the rigor of classroom assignments, strategies for making teacher evaluation more meaningful, how to use technology to provoke school

discussion of student achievement. While diverse, each reflected the interests of the cohort and therefore provided meaning to them.

Corollary 2: Commit for the Long-Term. Just as principals recognized the importance of a long-term commitment to school reform, a long-term commitment to their own professional growth was an important finding from this project. One principal described first-year activities as "show and tell." She elaborated, "I was reluctant to share anything bad about my school. I didn't know the people in the group, even those from my own district. Usually staff development is about quick fixes. I was reluctant to commit."

This principal was not alone. Participants questioned both their district and the foundation's support for the project. This manifested itself in superficial discussion and participants excusing themselves to make phone calls and attend meetings.

As the project proceeded attitudes changed. A two-year commitment to the project complemented by participant ownership of the topics being investigated created a climate conducive to more productive work. Indeed, not until the long-term commitment was assured did many participants become more engaged and enthusiastic.

During the second year of the project both districts announced their intention to extend the program with local funds. These local activities varied slightly and did not include interaction between districts, but continued cohort activities.

Multi-year commitments were essential to building support among the participants. Long-term investment in the professional development of principals, while appreciated by the participants, reflected a recognition of the complexity of the work and the challenges faced. It led to deeper and more complex discourse about school reform and strengthened the commitment by individual principals in the project.

Corollary 3: Assure Organizational Support. While many district personnel advocate greater attention to teaching and learning by principals they continue

practices which emphasize and reward management functions. In districts the size of Corpus Christi and Jefferson County principals frequently found themselves dealing with a maze of central office personnel many of whom were unfamiliar with the project let alone their greater emphasis on instructional leadership.

The need for consistent support from the central-office emerged. If cohort work was a priority, then principals need not fear sanctioning due to their participation. In both districts, staff who reported directly to the Superintendent advocated for the principals. This advocacy manifested itself in support for innovation, acquisition of resources for new programs, released time for participation in the project, and most importantly buffering from much of the administrivia common to the contemporary principalship.

Some principals were initially cautious in considering creative and innovative approaches to standards-based reform. For example, one principal commented that, "I know I would never be supported. As soon as someone complained, I would be told to back off--stop the project." At a minimum, principals must perceive that support is present for engaging in risk-taking on behalf of advancing student achievement and standards-based reform.

Throughout this project central-office staff enthusiastically embraced the principal's work. They permitted large numbers of principals to be out of the district. They provided resources to acquire materials, assured building coverage, and to the extent possible reduced administrivia---tasks that detracted from the focus of the project. Removing barriers to participation contributed greatly to the success of this project.

Lesson 3: Offer Intellectually Rigorous Experiences

Principals are busy folks. Their day is filled with meetings, phone calls, student and teacher interaction. Traditional professional development often feels like an intrusion into their "real" work. This project found that principals, just like teachers and students, resist "busy work" but thrive on intellectually challenging experiences. For example, one early activity asked participants to participate in an activity many previously used with their faculties---an

examination of varied teaching and working styles. Most knew their styles and the characteristics associated with each. The activity was tolerated until one of the facilitators announced a role playing component. At that point, the participants' became passively resistant. They left to make phone calls, they doodled on their papers, they refused to select roles. Upon debriefing one described the resistance. "We've covered that stuff over and over. We don't want to rehash the same old things. It's time for new challenges, grappling with the really important issues."

Corollary 1: Appreciate the Complexity of the Work. Equally important was recognition that the persistent issues faced by urban middle school principals are complex, multi-faceted, and lend themselves to more than one solution (Mizell, 1994). Acknowledging these descriptors was critical in building trust and camaraderie among the principals. Faced with the day-to-day realities of contemporary school life they recognized that low student achievement, poor instruction, lack of resources, and pervasive apathy among students and adults did not lend themselves to easy answers.

Respecting the principal's knowledge of their schools, and the challenges they faced was key to the success of this project. One principal stated, "I thought it would just be another high-priced consultant telling us what to do. Thank goodness it wasn't. I learned more from other principals than I ever learned from attending a workshop."

Corollary 2: Provide Opportunity for Reflection. Discourse and reflection about one's work became central to this project. Thoughtful discussion about real issues emerged as essential and affirmed learnings from other reform initiatives (Garmston & Wellman, 1998; Pugach & Johnson, 1990; and Speck, 1996).

Contemporary school leaders face competing demands for their time. Organizational and logistical issues may easily overwhelm a principal, leaving little time for thinking, processing, and reflecting. Rarely are principals rewarded for taking time to read, think, and create new meaning. The cohort experience

legitimized one of the most important characteristics of effective leaders---thoughtful reflection about one's practice (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Cohort members repeatedly identified the value of their own personal reflection, and opportunity to think critically and pose difficult and contentious questions to supportive colleagues. They were uniformly grateful for the opportunity to learn about programs in one another's schools, to talk with colleagues about reform issues, and to discuss strategies that either advanced or inhibited reform initiatives. Even principals in the same district commented on the value of visiting and learning about programs in their own district. It was clear that time for personal and collective reflection and examination of practice is of great value to the principals.

Summary

Recognizing the importance of the principal's leadership and their commitment to school reform, this project invested in strengthening the leadership capacity of middle school principals in two urban districts confronting persistent issues of low student achievement. It created a structure that actively engaged principals in examining their practice, in identifying persistent school-reform issues, and constructing strategies to address those concerns.

Devoting energy to the creation of community among participants, focusing on real school issues, and providing ample time for discourse and reflection were critical attributes. The opportunity to "step away" from the day-to-day realities of school life and devote time to thoughtful analysis of persistent school problems resulted in renewed energy and commitment to reform in their schools.

References

Ashton, P. & Webb, R. (1986). Making a difference: Teacher's sense of efficacy and student achievement. New York: Longman.

Barnett, B. & Muse, I. (1993). Cohort groups in educational administration: Promises and challenges. Journal of School Leadership, 3, 400-415.

Brooks, J. & Brooks, M. (1993). The case for constructivist classrooms. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Charles, C. M. (1995). Introduction to educational research (2nd. Ed). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Cherniss, C. (1998). Social and emotional learning for leaders. Educational Leadership, 55(7), 26-28.

Council of Chief State School Officers (1996). Interstate school leader licensure consortium: Standards for school leaders. Washington, DC: Author.

Eisner, E. (1991). Enlightened eye. New York: MacMillan.

Evans, P. & Mohr, N. (1999). Professional development for principals, Phi Delta Kappan, 80(7), 530-532.

Garmston, R. (1998). Graceful conflict. Journal of Staff Development, 19(3), 56-58.

Garmston, R. & Wellman, B. (1998). Teacher talk that makes a difference. Educational Leadership, 55(7), 30-34.

Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). Becoming qualitative researchers. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Guskey, T. (2000). Evaluating professional development. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Guskey, T. & Sparks, D. (1991, March). Complexities in evaluating the effects of staff development programs. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Lambert, L. (1998). Building leadership capacity in schools. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Miles, M. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mizell, H. (1994). The new principal: Risk, reform, and the quest for hard-core learning. New York: The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

Mohr, N. (1998a). Constructivist zone. Journal of Staff Development, 19(3), 22-26.

Mohr, N. (1998b). Creating effective study groups for principals. Educational Leadership, 55(7), 41-44.

Monahan, T. C. (1996). Do contemporary incentives and rewards perpetuate outdated forms of professional development? Journal of Staff Development, 17(1), 44-47.

Murray, G. (1998). New leaders for restructured schools: Can cohort models meet the challenge? The AASA Professor, 21(4). Retrieved April 21, 2000 from World Wide Web: http://www.aasa.org/TAP/spring9804.htm

Neufeld, B. (1997). Responding to the expressed needs of urban middle school principals. Urban Education, 31(5), 490-509.

Pugach, M. & Johnson, L. (1990). Developing reflective practice through structured dialogue. In R. Clift, W. R. Houston, & M. Pugach. Encouraging reflective practice in education. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Schwann, C. & Spady, W. (1998). Why change doesn't happen and how to make sure it does. Educational Leadership, 55(7),45-47.

Sergiovanni, T. (1996). Leadership for the schoolhouse. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sparks, D. & Hirsh, S. (1997). A new vision for staff development. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Speck, M. (1996). Best practice in professional development for sustained educational change. ERS Spectrum, 14(2), 33-41.

Spradley, J. (1979). The ethnographic interview. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Useem, E., Christman, J., Gold, E. & Simon, E. (1997). Reforming alone: barriers to organizational learning in urban school change initiatives. Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 2(1), 55-78.

Wagner, T. (1998). Change as collaborative inquiry. Phi Delta Kappan, 79(7), 512-517.

Yin, R. (1994). Case study research: Design and methods (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Zepeda, S. (1999). Staff development: Practices that promote leadership in learning communities. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Renorming the Professional Development of Urban Middle School Principals	
Author(s): Ronald D. Williamson	
Corporate Source: Paper Presented at NCPEA	Publication Date: August 2000

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☒

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) *and* paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature: Ronald D. Williamson	Printed Name/Position/Title: Ronald Williamson, Associate Professor	
Organization/Address: Eastern Michigan University, 304 Porter, Ypsilanti, MI 48176	Telephone: 734-429-8261	FAX: 734-429-5371
	E-Mail Address: ron.williamson@emich.edu	Date: 9/20/03

(Over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
5207 University of Oregon
Eugene OR 97403-5207
Attn: Acquisitions

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2001)